

# THE STORY OF L'AIGLON

A Translation of  
THE GREAT FRENCH ROMANCE

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[Continued from last week]

## CHAPTER III. METTERNICH.

Old Silvere was wise in interrupting the interview. In this vast and luxurious imperial residence, where legions of valets were moving at all hours of day and night, where the walls had ears, he knew that he was hardly tolerated, that he was watched every hour, for no one was ignorant of his tenderness for the young prince.

"Poor Silvere! What would he have thought if on returning to the cottage with Colette after the departure of the prince he could have penetrated to the apartment where Prince Metternich, returning to his desk, sitting opposite his secretary, rapidly tore open the voluminous correspondence which he had just received from all the capitals of Europe. Crouching like an immense spider in the midst of a diplomatic web, loaded with honor and riches, possessing the grand cross of all the orders of Europe, Prince Metternich, minister of state and grand chancellor, was troubled by day and his relief broken by night. It was the specter of Napoleon that troubled him.

Yet the emperor was dead. On this special day the chancellor was more gloomy and more than usual. Looking from his window, he had seen the son of the man he had abhorred talking with the old sufferer who was perpetually turning up in his path. The thought of the man who made kings tremble and the servant of the young prince equally disturbed him. He, Metternich, a master whom no one could resist, was constrained to lower his eyes before the old man, and often he had gone out of his way to avoid meeting him in the park.

And who was this young girl conversing with the prince and presenting him with something which Metternich could not distinctly discover from a distance? And this letter—was it a petition, as the supplicating attitude of the young girl seemed to indicate? At least it must have been a letter from France, where there were signs of insurrection. Arousing himself, Metternich turned toward his secretary.

"We will work no more today," he said, rising and pushing away a pile of letters. "It is a fine day; take a holiday, but be here early tomorrow to make up for lost time." The young man rose, bowed respectfully and left the room. When the sound of his footsteps had died away, Metternich rose quickly from his table and rang the bell; a lackey appeared and stood before the prince, awaiting his order. Deep in his reflections the diplomat seemed to have forgotten his presence, when, raising his head and perceiving the servant, he said quickly:

"Florent, Count Otto de Falkenstein, as he is in the chateau? Go and find him and tell him that I desire his presence immediately."

The valet hurried off to give the order, and the chancellor, more somber than ever, seated himself at his table and began examining the numerous documents before him.

## CHAPTER IV. THE LETTER.

When Reichstadt had left Silvere and Colette he regained his apartments, profoundly troubled. The view of this tender and devoted young girl who had spoken to him of his country in so touching a manner made his heart beat quicker and gave birth to sentiments which up to this time he had not experienced. Taking the bunch of violets, he placed them before him on his desk. The view of these flowers, faded after a long journey from France, cast him into a reverie in which melancholy was not exempt from sweetness.

Did they not typify his own destiny?

His life had been a troubled one and at 20 years, an age ordinarily joyful to young hearts, had brought him burdens almost impossible to be borne. But more important matters claimed his meditations. He thought of the letter which Colette had given him; he listened to open it. Hardly had his eyes rested upon it when he carried it to his lips, with a long, pious kiss. He recognized the writing of his father, the Emperor Napoleon. Dated at St. Helena, the letter had been written on the last days of the emperor's life. In the brief and concise style of a soldier, through which at times shone the affection of a father, the captive, too proud to complain of his destiny, developed to his son a plan of restoring the empire. With the insight of genius, reading as from an open book, he reviewed step by step the events which had overthrown him. Concluding, he adjured his son that when the hour should come he should not hesitate to draw his sword and boldly claim the patrimony for the preservation of which his father had struggled to the end.

Devoted friends who had never abandoned him and in whom he had great confidence would be able to decide upon the proper hour and would inform him of the time and place where an appeal to arms, sanctioned by his presence, would have a chance of success.

Then, as Saul upon the road to Damascus on the day when the light of the Most High shone upon his soul, the young man fell upon his knees and, in his confidence in the genius of his father, swore to throw off that unworthy slavery in which he was chained, to reconquer his lost heritage, never to sheathe his sword until that day when, coming from Notre Dame, a crown upon his head, a scepter in his hand, he would be sufficiently strong to avenge the acts of treason and the injuries of his enemies, also magnanimous enough to pardon.

A moment before, he had entered the room a pale, timid child. Now, a man with haughty brow and determined mien, he was ready to leave it, to battle courageously and fear nothing.

## CHAPTER V. THE COUNT OF FALKENSTEIN.

When Fouché, duke of Otranto, formerly imperial chief of police and, after the restoration, charged by Louis XVIII with the same office, had fallen into disgrace with his royal master, he felt it necessary to leave Paris, and fixed her residence in Austria. He had a natural son, Otto, who possessed



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## BERNHARDT AND COQUELIN IN "L'AIGLON."

"JUST PULL MY EAR AS YOUR FATHER USED TO WHEN WE'D PLEASED HIM."

a predisposition to evil.

One night Prince Metternich, in need of a tool, had cast his net into the depths of Viennese society and by chance drew out the kind of man he required, this same Otto de Falkenstein, whom he had summoned.

When he knocked at the door of the prince's apartment, the latter was pacing back and forth, crushing in his feverish hands a letter which a courier had just brought to the chateau.

The news from his correspondent, the prefect of police in Paris, was not at all reassuring. A Bonapartist conspiracy was on the point of breaking out, for the purpose of getting rid of the present government and re-establishing the empire. A number of emissaries had crossed the frontier. The police also reported the simultaneous disappearance from Paris of certain generals of the empire, secret partisans of the old regime, and who without doubt were coming to see the prince. They were hoping to win him over, to kidnap him if necessary, and to carry him to some place on the frontier where certain regiments whose loyalty to the monarchy of July was suspected were stationed. Inspired by this return from the Isle of Elba, as it were, they would advance by forced marches upon Paris, exciting the people and troops by the way to insurrection. King Louis Philippe (continued the prefect of police) had not at first placed much confidence in these rumors, but little by little they assumed such proportions that a council was held in the Tuilleries to arrange with the minister of foreign affairs for dispatching a secret diplomatic note to the chancellor of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. It was the intention to advise him of the conspiracy, begging him to use all his influence with the Duke of Reichstadt to dissuade him from an undertaking which threatened to revolutionize Eu-

rope and, in any case, would result in the shedding of streams of blood. The prefect added in a postscript that a young girl charged with a preparatory message to the young Napoleon preceded the generals. She was to instruct him of the intended project and to arrange with him a rendezvous near the chateau where they could concert measures to bring the enterprise to a head and place the Duke of Reichstadt on the throne of his fathers.

"You have taken your time to comply with my order to come to me," said the prince to Otto after his arrival.

"Your excellency," replied the young man, "will not only excuse the delay with which I have obeyed your orders, but, on the contrary, will commend me when you hear my report. Last night I arrived at the chateau about 10 o'clock and repaired to the suit of apartments reserved for me. At so late an hour and covered with dust after my long journey I was scarcely presentable to your excellency. This morning at an early hour I was up and waiting to be summoned when an unexpected circumstance—the meeting of a person whose presence here I was far from suspecting—But I am wandering from my subject."

"Collect your thoughts," said the prince. "Give me an account of your journey to Paris and the news which you have to report. What did you see there?"

"Surprising things, which I will recount to you. Arriving there toward noon on Monday, I went to report to our ambassador, whom I found in an unquiet state of mind and preoccupied. He quickly made me acquainted with the news of the day, the floating rumors and the projected plot. He gave me the names of those implicated and told me that he had put upon the case all the police force at his disposal, but that the conspirators had

of Reichstadt accompanied her. As I passed there I heard the young girl say in a low voice, 'At Camaldules—the 5th of May at midnight.'"

Metternich rose, but before dismissing the count he said: "In this affair, as you say, chance has played an important part. Come again soon for new instructions. Keep your eyes open. Gain the duke's confidence. He does not know you, but I will see that you have an introduction to him. Good morning. I desire to be alone."

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## CHAPTER VI. IN THE GROVE.

After his meeting with Colette, which Otto had observed and reported to Metternich, Reichstadt began to experience the first mysterious symptoms of the malady called love. Although he resolved not to yield to temptation, the sight of this chaste and beautiful girl and her devotion to his old servant had kindled a flame in his breast which increased daily. Since the day when he fell upon his knees before the letter of his father and resolved to reclaim his heritage he had undergone a complete transformation. Timid and irresolute before, he was now bold and decided.

One spring morning, after having passed a sleepless night, he entered the park. Colette, who had just returned from Vienna, seeing him from her window, went toward a shady marble seat where she knew the duke was accustomed to read and dream. Two days before a beggar at the park gate, in thanking her for a florin which she had given him, made a mysterious sign, and after a conference with Silvere she had gone to Vienna. There, in an interview with her two traveling companions, the generals, it was decided she should induce the duke to meet them on the 5th of May at midnight in the Monastery of Camaldules, off the road to Wagram.

When the duke, raising his eyes, saw Colette coming toward him, he was so surprised that he dropped the book which he was reading. He quickly recovered himself and, going to her, invited her to be seated on the marble bench.

"Why have you come?" he said. "I hope there is nothing the matter. Is Silvere ill? I saw him here yesterday walking in the garden. But your hand trembles. Do you fear me? Calm yourself."

"Monsieur," said Colette, "when you know, you, too, will be excited."

"Have you received news from France? Has anything happened to interfere with our plans or to interfere with our departure?"

"Yes," replied Colette, rising. "It is about a departure, but not mine, yours. But before telling you about it I wish to inspire you with the same feelings that animate me. When I was a child, my mother on winter nights read me the story of 'Joan of Arc,' who was sent from heaven to place the king back upon his throne and drive out the English. How I wished to be that heroine, that I could wield the sword against the enemies of France and be with the king in the hour of his triumph! God has favored me, for, if you are willing, in two days we will set out. Two generals, loyal to your father, await us. I wish to be the first to salute you as emperor."

Suited to the action to the word, Colette seized the hand of the duke and carried it respectfully to her lips. Reichstadt, overcome by emotion and sensible that it was unsafe to remain longer in the wood, offered her his arm. In taking leave of her he asked the place and hour of rendezvous. It was then that the spy heard the words:

"The 5th of May—Camaldules."

The great windows of the chateau of Schonbrunn are resplendent with lamps. The vast building, the park, the terraces of the garden, are bathed in the pale light of a spring evening. The orchestra is discoursing redows and polonaises. On the floor of the salon, standing by his grandfather, the Emperor Francis II, is the Duke of Reichstadt, the recipient of many honors from the invited guests. Under the chandeliers figures are whirling in the dance, and uniforms of all colors, covered with gold and silver lace, contrast with the white shoulders and jewels of the women.

Near a window apart from the throng the Prince of Metternich and Otto de Falkenstein are talking in a low voice, and when at midnight the chateau clock announces the hour for supper the dancers, preceded by the emperor and the archduchess, proceed toward the dining hall, the doors of which are opened by lackeys. Metternich and his tool slip out and proceed toward the right wing of the palace. There under the platform of La Gloriette are the apartments of the Duke of Reichstadt.

The galleries and staircases are deserted, and everything seems to favor the nocturnal expedition of the prince of the Austro-Hungarian empire, who, a demi-bravo, a demi-spy, a prey to hate and resentment, has descended so low that he is going at night, like a burglar, to pick a lock and possess himself of the secrets of the grandson of his master, the emperor.

All is silent. Through an open window comes the sound of tuning violins. Supper is finished, and the dancers are about to recommence, not to finish until daybreak.

The light flashes upon a tool in the hand of the spy. Under his touch, which does not appear to be unfamiliar with the work, the lock gives way, and the interior of the chamber appears illuminated by the pale light of a night lamp which burns at the head of the bed and casts a dim light about the apartment. Metternich, paralyzed, has only to stretch forth his hand to possess the accursed letter which has troubled him by day and chased away sleep by night. He trembles. He hesitates.

He sinks into a chair.

Suddenly he arises and starts as if confronted by a serpent. On the desk

scarcely two steps away from him is the bronze mask of the Emperor Napoleon in the talons of an immense eagle, which seems to protect and defend it.

It is the only souvenir which the young man has retained of his father. A pious servitor preserved the death mask from oblivion. More fortunate than his master, he returned to France and, seeking a great artist, confided it to him.

From this plaster mask came forth the masterpiece, after which the original mold was immediately destroyed. The bronze image the young man kept by him to remind him of his father.

At sight of it the remorse which had made Metternich tremble for the cowardly and dishonorable action in which he was engaged in company with a vile spy was replaced by hate and rage.

The burden of years dropped from his shoulders, and, advancing, he stretched his hand toward the mask, exclaiming: "Even in this palace your detested image comes to trouble me. Is your tomb so lightly closed that your accursed countenance comes through years and the depths of space to awaken bitter memories in my soul? Your abhorred image may inspire your son, but you have not counted upon me. I am here to watch you."

Then, turning away from the rigid mask in a burst of wrath which he endeavored to conceal from his companion in guilt, he turned toward Otto and, in a troubled voice, said:

"What we are looking for ought not to be far away. Raise the bronze and look under it."

Otto obeyed, and, having lightly raised the bronze, there upon the desk cover was a paper which bore the imperial arms. Metternich seized it and hurriedly cast his eyes over it.

The further he advanced in the reading the deeper became his frown.

When he had finished, he turned to Otto and said:

"Your reports and the inferences I have drawn from them are fully confirmed. We are on the eve of a plot, all the intricate facts of which are in my possession. Have you not told me that the adopted daughter of this soldier-gardener has arranged for the duke a meeting in the ruined monastery off the road to Wagram, a few leagues from here? I forget the date. What is it?"

"Tomorrow, the 5th of May, at midnight, and I have good reason to remember. It was chosen because—it is the day."

"Enough!" said Metternich. "It is the date of the emperor's death. Well, if that anniversary suits them, I am satisfied. I shall make such arrangements that they shall not forget it. But time passes. Let us go before our presence here is discovered."

When the two men had departed and their footsteps had died in the distance, a frightened face emerged from an angle of the apartment covered with a heavy drapery, and Colette appeared in the rays of the rising sun.

[Continued next week]

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